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ABSTRACT

There have been changes in approaches in certifying public school teachers, but when viewed in historical perspective, these have been changes in degree rather than changes in kind. This paper charts the history of certification/licensure and teacher testing to facilitate better understanding of the issue. The second task is to show the influence on the teaching profession of both teacher testing and licensure/certification through the use of historical examples from within and from outside the teaching profession. Comparisons with medicine and law are made. The third task is to show how important elements from the past might be used to influence public policy regarding teacher testing and licensure/certification in the future. (JD)

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The Legacy of Competency Testing and Licensure/Certification for the Teaching Profession

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Running head: THE LEGACY OF COMPETENCY TESTING AND LICENSURE

A revised version of a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, Las Vegas, Nevada, April, 1987.

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The Legacy of Competency Testing and Licensure/Certification for the Teaching Profession

The last decade has been characterised as being "marked by dramatic changes in approaches in certifying public school teachers." (Rubinstein, McDonough & Allan, 1986) In this paper I will argue that there have been changes but when viewed in historical perspective, these have been changes in degree rather than changes in kind. For that reason we may be able to predict, with some degree of accuracy, the effects of these changes on the future of the teaching profession.

I have taken as my charge a three part task: the first is to chart the history of certification/ licensure and teacher testing in this country in the hope of enabling us to better understand both where we are and from whence we came. The second is that through the use of historical examplars both from within and from outside the teaching profession we may see the influence on our profession of both teacher testing and licensure/certification in broader relief. Thus comparisons with medicine and law will be made from time to time. My third task is to show how important elements from our past might be used to influence public policy regarding teacher testing and licensure/certification in the future.

Any historian, but particularly the soi-disant scholar, must beware of predicting the future from the past. Additionally, he or she must address the problem of definition in history. The problem of definition can be subdivided into: (1) pitfalls of vagueness and (2) pitfalls of presentism. In this paper I am guilty of both; the former because of the need to deal in generalizations when reviewing three centuries of educational history in a limited amount of space, and the latter because I have applied to past developments the present day terms of certification and licensure,- terms which did not exist in seventeenth and eighteenth-century America.

Having highlighted the problem of definition, I will now leap headlong into it by defining licensure as "the process by which an agency of the government grants permission to an individual to engage in a given occupation upon finding that the applicant has attained the minimal degree of competency required to ensure that the public health, safety and welfare will be reasonably well protected" (U.S. Dept. of H.E.W., 1977). Licensure is thus the generic term applying to admission to any professional field. Certification, by contrast, grants the use of a title (e.g. "teacher") to an individual who has met a

predetermined set of standards or qualifications set by a credentialing agency (Shimburg, 1981).

Certification is here defined as "a process of legal sanction, authorizing the holder of a credential to perform specific services in the public schools of the state" (Kinney, 1964, p.36). By "state", is meant the area of jurisdiction of the certification agency, which has developed from a township or county in the 19th century to the state government in the 20th century. Certification is valued not only as a guarantee of quality, but as an instrument for direct action by the public when it undertakes to improve the educational program (Kinney, 1964).

The underlying motivation which has remained constant throughout the three centuries which this discussion will cover, albeit of necessity sketchily, has been the improvement of education. Licensure/certification and competency testing are all key elements in this process. Specifically, however, they have been used as instruments for controlling who may teach in schools.

Thus, some of the questions which have helped frame this discussion are:

1. To what extent has licensure/certification been

effective in controlling who teaches?

2. To what extent has teacher testing been effective in controlling who teaches?

3. Who has been in control of licensure/certification and teaching testing?

4. What has been the influence of the teaching profession on the selection and training of teachers?

5. How does this compare to the influence of other professions in controlling the selection and education of their respective memberships?

To help answer some of these questions I want to review "from whence we came." I hope this will also highlight some of the factors of which we need to take account when piloting our future. So, what is the history of teacher certification and teacher testing? Is teacher testing a "new, ...largely unevaluated policy initiative in education" as has recently been suggested (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1984, p. 25 cited in Vold, 1985). What are the roots of "quality control" for teachers?

The first selection procedures for teachers were originally stipulated in the law of the colonies. Thus in 1686, the General Assembly of Virginia "requested the appointment in every county of a person who would be duly fit to examine and license

schoolmasters (Kinney, 1964, p. 4). Beyond being loyal in politics and orthodox in religion, the primary qualifications for which the examiners were looking were threefold: (a) the capacity to govern a school, (b) moral character, and (c) academic attainments. The order is not unimportant. The teacher's capacity to govern was of primary importance. The necessity for muscle and courage was clearly necessary. One wonders whether the concerns over responsibility for discipline in schools today, doesn't mean that there has been as much constancy as there has been change in education in three centuries. Constancy is a recurring theme throughout this discussion.

Moral Character was assessed by interview and testimonial. Evidence of academic qualification was obtainable only by individual examination during the interview process. However, the major problem of scarcity of good applicants made the use of searching, and carefully designed examinations the exception. One is reminded of the effects of the recent introduction of competency tests in Louisiana, where the State Board of Education set the standard at a level where 47% of the teachers failed the test. The

consequent threat of a teacher shortage forced the legislature to enact a law allowing a reasonable time for "retesting" to "pass" the examination (Pearson, 1981, p. 28).

One further factor from Colonial times should be stressed. Teachers were clearly differentiated along a broad continuum in character, purposes and status, depending in large part upon whether they were male or female, and whether they taught in urban or rural settings. At one extreme were the rural schools, open from two to four months per year, with low salaries, offering winter employment for literate farm hands or young men studying for the law or ministry, but with no promise for a career or any professional growth. At the other, the grammar schools in larger towns and cities were open up to twelve months per year, with salaries comparable to those in other fields, and where teaching could be made a career. The degree of differentiation is important for, as Kinney (1964) notes, "any sense of common interests, such as led physicians and lawyers to make common cause against competition from the unqualified, could not exist in this very diversified membership." (p.24) Herein, in historical terms, lies the first of two major sources of frustration for those who would have teaching mirror medicine and law in its status as a

profession: the lack of professional self-regulation, in terms of controlling the quality of teachers. Quantity of teachers has historically been a more pertinent concern than quality. This has thus countered the possibility of quality control from within the profession, because the overriding policy in certification has always been to maintain teacher supply at the expense of teacher quality whenever necessary, and all too often it has been necessary.

The one significant contribution of the colonial period, from the standpoint of licensure/ certification, is the beginning of the use of the teacher examination as a means of identifying competence. It had one major usage; it selected out the utterly illiterate and probably discouraged the wholly incompetent from applying to become teachers. However, as a device for predicting teaching success it was totally inadequate. Teacher testing is not a new phenomenon. In some shape or form it has been in existence since colonial times.

Local control, which characterised the colonial period, grew to become state control during the 19th century. This change was driven in large part by the need for the development of administrative procedures for regularizing employment practices in public

schools, without jeopardizing the supply of teachers (Kinney, 1964). The teaching profession, as a profession, really did not exist and, as such, could do little to promote itself as an influence on the certification structure. In fact professional preparation developed independently of certification and neither really influenced the other (Kinney p.65).

The change from local to state control of teacher certification only mirrored other developments, such as the financial and curricular changes which became the state's responsibility by the end of the nineteenth century. Administration of the teacher examinations which served as the device for establishing and maintaining control of certification, carried with it authority to certify. In effect, the cadre of individuals who made up the teaching profession were now under the control of state administrators.

One positive result of administrative authority being centralized at the state level was the recognition of the necessity for college preparation for teaching. Professional training came to be seen as a prerequisite for certification. What was not foreseen however, was that program development in teacher preparation would become driven by certification requirements rather than being an independent process of curriculum building in a

professional school.

Herein lies a second source of the frustration felt by those who are unable to understand why teaching has not developed as a profession in a fashion similar to that of medicine and the law. From the earliest days, certification and licensing in medicine and law have never been intimately related. Certification as a teacher has always been the goal of programs of teacher education. We have taught to the test, but have not been particularly instrumental in developing that test. Certification has been an administrative and not a professional function. By contrast, medicine has decreed that being granted a license by the state, and being granted professional status by peer professionals are two totally separate although not totally unrelated things. College board exams in medicine do not "drive" medical school curricula, whereas there has been a history of certification requirements driving teacher education programs.

Testing became increasingly formalized and standardized during the nineteenth century. The early days of oral examinations, in which a candidate was asked to read a few selected passages, demonstrate handwriting, solve some simple arithmetic

problems or describe the best route from Novgorod to Kilimanjaro (Tyack and Hansot, 1982) gave way, if slowly, to highly refined and sterotyped examinations - written examinations. Admittedly this was not a linear process, but with the development of written tests, standardization became increasingly possible. The elements of these tests - possession of basic skills, proficiency in teaching techniques, and knowledge of subject matter, - are all familiar to us today as elements of teacher tests. In recent history what has changed is: (a) the degree of emphasis accorded each of these three elements; (b) the manner in which they are characterized, and (c) the way in which they are assessed. What has not changed is the question which critics of teacher examinations have continued to raise. Can effectiveness in teaching be produced by legislation and measured by examination?

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the increasingly static and standardized nature of teacher testing was very much at odds with the growing body of educational literature and thought of men like William James and John Dewey. The focus of education began to change from being a means of imparting knowledge, and filling a vessel, to the development of the interests of the child.

Competency tests for teachers were thought to have been appropriate for an era in which pupils were viewed as passive objects and the teacher the fountain of all knowledge, to be imparted to the student. Such tests could measure the teacher's store of knowledge - the store of facts that had so impressed Dickens' Mr. Gradgrind. However, such tests told nothing of a teacher's curiosity, creativity or sensitivity, (Vold,1985). They told nothing of the teacher's ability to practice teaching as a pattern of action (to use Dewey's notion) in the same way that doctors practiced medicine as a pattern of action. Furthermore since the tests failed to keep pace with the expansion of the curriculum and the increasing specialization of teaching roles, such as that of physical educator, reformers urged that they be eliminated in favor of proper preparation in appropriate teacher preparations programs. This was seen as an important development because the tests were increasingly being thought of as a back door route into teaching.

However, there was no period during the nineteenth century when the number of well-prepared teachers was sufficient to staff both the metropolitan areas where salaries were relatively attractive, and the rural

areas where salaries were low. To meet the demand in the rural areas especially, it became common practice to accept candidates whose performance was unsatisfactory or to certificate them with credentials of a lower grade. Thus the policy of giving priority to quantity over quality of teachers is coeval with certification and intimately associated with the use of competency exams to credential teachers. Kinney (1964) suggests that such a policy highlights the civil service nature of certification/licensing and the fact that this took precedence over the professional function of such a procedure - in direct contrast to medicine and law.

The tradition of teacher testing as a means of certification never did die out because of the continuing shortage of teachers during the first half of the present century. And despite the prevailing school of educational thought, characterised by the work of Dewey, administrative expediency always won out over educational theory. It has been administrative policy to give precedence to quantity over quality, particularly in periods of crisis. Thus by the year 1919-20, when half of America's teachers served in schools for not more than four or five years, (Tyack & Hansot, 1982) a continued shortage of teachers meant the

continuation of examinations for the purpose of maintaining the required quantity of teachers necessary to fill the positions available. The teacher shortage reached its peak during the Second World War and again competency exams were seen as a means of alternative credentialing to the now traditional teacher education programs. Exams were less a means of selection than a system for enabling those with lower standards of preparation and inferior qualifications to enter classrooms. There appear to be two major reasons why competency tests continued in an era when educational thought was so obviously against them: the impotence of the teaching profession to be self-policing, and the strength of the civil service function of state administration in the organization of schooling.

Through a quantitative analysis of the literature published between 1894 and 1950, Johnson (1984) has attempted to show, that there was increasing support for the perspective of "productivity" and the "cult of efficiency" in the preparation of teachers, the organization of schools and the working lives of teachers. Johnson suggests that from the time of Joseph Mayor Rice onwards good schooling, as opposed to good education, became, first and foremost, a

problem in scientific management. The administrator was no longer the counselor or master teacher of the past. He quickly became the leader, the manager of a commercial industrial enterprise. These "Managers of Virtue" as Tyack & Hansot (1982) have termed them, were social engineers who brought about a smoothly meshing corporate society (p.6). The model through which they chose to improve education in the first half of the twentieth century was that of scientific management. The techniques they used were those standardized managerial techniques, capable of objective measurement.

We are the heirs of that legacy and among the tools we have gleaned from their approach are mastery learning, behavioral objectives, and the ongoing use of teacher competency testing. For with the introduction of the National Teacher Examination in 1940, teacher testing had come of age. It was to be introduced in the name of reform - a cry which has since become even more familiar to us. We have developed a view of teachers as producers of learning. We are pre- occupied with "quality control," "outcome measures," and teachers as "time managers." Teacher competency tests fit neatly into this conception of education. And whereas their success in the past had been limited

to solving problems of a lack of quantity of teachers, belief in their power and utility led administrators to think that such tests could also solve problems of quality which have plagued us increasingly in the post-war years. As we have moved from crisis to crisis in education - from Sputnik in the 60's to the problems of minorities in the 70's an 80's - the cries for educational reform have been echoed in the response of increasing and improving teacher testing. There has been historical precedent for this as we have seen although past efforts might be better characterized as the use of tests to exclude the incompetent rather than to select the competent.

The way in which we have defined the problem of improving the preparation and certification/licensure (and thus the competence) of teachers has inevitably accorded us the solutions we have adopted. Redefine the problem, and our possible solutions would look very different.

If we mandate teacher testing we can continue to debate the answers to questions such as:

1. What happens to the supply of teachers?

2. What happens to the supply of minority teachers?

3. Will the tests really measure the ability to

teach?

All of these are questions that have been framed by the way in which we have shaped the original problem. Education continues to be regarded as the cure-all for America's ills. And the requirements of accountability and cost effectiveness become more and more the language of improvement. The public, fewer and fewer of whom have had children in school in the past decade, are calling for better value for money and a better product. One cannot blame them for viewing learning as a product, schools as factories and education as a business. The teaching profession has done little to alter this view and continues to be unable to be self-policing. Education presents the anomaly of a profession without licensure. Certification was not designed as licensure in education, and is thus not effective in serving it. Since licensure is the process by which a profession controls the quality of its membership and thus determines its efficiency as a profession, the consequences of its lack are serious both for the profession and the public.

Competency exams are being used as they have always been used; as a means of averting further crisis. They are more subtle and refined as instruments than they have ever been, and they will,

no doubt, continue even more effectively to prevent the illiterate from entering teaching. However, they don't address the major issue of experimenting and researching to find more efficient means of selecting and educating good teachers. Don't lets blame the victims in this sad tale. We need to examine the profession not the teachers.

Until we, as a profession, are ready to do that, we must, of necessity, institute the best measures we know how to ensure the quality of the teaching force - and that means examinations to bolster accreditation. But history tells us that, at best, this is a short-term prevention, not a long-term solution to the problem of improving the quality of teachers in our schools and thus the quality of education we are providing for our future. The measurers will and must continue to measure. But let's hope that we can encourage them to search for better ways to measure quality and not just quantity. There lies our professional obligation and the opportunity to gain control over the quality of teachers in our classrooms and gymnasia.

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